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ANCIENT APPROACHES TO PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

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The cover image shows a copy, in Luni marble, of the portrait of Plato made by Silanion c. 370 BC for the Academia in Athens. From the sacred area in Largo Argentina, 1925. Musei Capitolini, Rome.

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MUSIC AND THE RETURN OF THE SOUL IN PROCLUS' COMMENTARIES ON PLATO'S *TIMAEUS* AND *REPUBLIC*

SEBASTIAN F. MORO TORNESE

Introduction

As is well known, music in Neoplatonic thought is closely connected with philosophy. Music is not only an art but also an *episteme*, a ‘science’ according to the Pythagorean tradition, namely an intellectual knowledge, which elevates the soul to the principles of reality. In this paper we shall explore the role of music in the ‘return of the soul’, according to Proclus’ *Commentaries on Plato’s Timaeus and Republic*. For it is in these two dialogues that the depiction of the ascent of the soul from the sensible world (‘the cave’) is closely related to both education and the return to the intelligible.

The aim of education, according to Plato and the Neoplatonists, is to elevate the soul to the *Nous* (the Intellect). In other words, to awake the *Nous* within the soul and to lead it towards union with the One.¹ Although we already have the *Nous* within us, this principle – residing in the soul – is concealed or asleep and needs to be woken up or reactivated following a process of purification.² Music, as a source of purification and therapy for the soul,³ has an important place in Plato’s educational programme in the *Republic*: first, in combination with gymnastics, in the initial stage, and later on as one of the four mathematical disciplines in the *quadrivium*, which comprises arithmetic, geometry, harmony, and astronomy.

Above the level of music as a ‘science’, there is a higher level of inspired music. This kind of music puts the soul into direct contact with the principles of reality, through συγγένεια – that is, affinity or congeniality – and the presence of the divine harmony within the soul. Music, both as an inspired art and as a science, is considered to be ‘anagogic’, in the sense that it helps the soul to ascend and return to its primordial origin. This can be achieved because music as sacred art is capable of putting the soul into contact with the divine, through the ἀνάμνησις, the remembrance, of celestial beauty.

¹ Cf. Plato’s account of education in *Rep.* 518b 7 and Plotinus, *Enn.* II 1.3.

² For example, Hierocles’ *Commentary on the golden verses*, according to D. J. O’Meara, *Pythagoras revived* (Oxford 1989) 115, is ‘intended to provide an elementary initiation to philosophy based on Pythagorean principles and aiming beyond itself towards a Pythagorean goal (cf. 7, 17-18), assimilation to God.’ Cf. also O’Meara 16 ff. on the definition of philosophy and the role of mathematics in the flight of the soul according to Hierocles.

³ Cf. A. Sheppard, ‘Music therapy in Neoplatonism’ in *Philosophy and the sciences in antiquity*, ed. R.W. Sharples (Aldershot 2005) 148-55.

The central notion of music

In this context, music for the Neoplatonists is a reality that is richer than what is normally understood as ‘music’. Music is not only ‘audible music’, since it can also be studied with reference to its metaphysical principles. Nevertheless, even at the level of audible music, the presence of the metaphysical reality can be expressed in sounds because of inspiration and music’s evocative power.

Music can also be considered from a cosmological point of view. According to Pythagorean cosmology, mathematics is the study of numbers as ideal principles of order. Music, in this sense, is conceived both as playing a role in the cosmic process of manifestation, and as taking part in the contemplation of this process.

At the same time, in this contemplation the cosmological level is an occasion for ascent, by being a symbol of a higher reality. This ‘Pythagorean’ understanding of music is the central idea around which all other kinds of music revolve. With this universal notion of music in mind, the Neoplatonists are able to talk about manifestations of music at different levels of music, some of them being audible while others are not.

The main source for the Neoplatonic approach to cosmic music is Plato’s *Timaeus*. However, this dialogue also presents the foundations for the study of human music, for it portrays the microcosm-macrocosm analogy. The *Republic*, on the other hand, complements the *Timaeus*, for it discusses music from an educational point of view and in relation to the human soul, though not exclusively in connection to the World Soul as in the *Timaeus* (35c ff).

Music and the ultimate aim of philosophy and life

Although the cosmic music is mirrored in the human soul, according to Plato when it entered into the sensible world, the image of divine harmony was distorted, and the soul’s own harmony disarranged. For this reason, the soul needs to follow a process of purification, habituation to beauty, and assimilation to the object of contemplation. These notions can be found in many Neoplatonic philosophers. For example, the *Commentary on the golden verses* by Hierocles contains important general views, which can be applied to music. At the beginning of this work, the Neoplatonic philosopher attempts to define Pythagorean philosophy, which here is identified with Platonic philosophy:⁴

Philosophy is a purification and perfection of human life: a purification from our irrational, material nature and the mortal form of the body, a perfection by the recovery of our proper happiness, leading to divine likeness.⁵

Music shares similar aims with philosophy. For it also possesses a cathartic effect on the soul. And since the divine level is characterized by intelligible harmony, musical

⁴ See, O’Meara (n.2, above) 114 ff.

⁵ Hierocles, *Commentary on the golden verses*, Proem., 1 ff., trans. H. S. Schibli, *Hierocles of Alexandria* (New York 2002) 170. Hierocles goes on to state that, through Pythagorean philosophy: ‘... one may acquire truth and virtue, regain one’s purity, succeed in obtaining likeness to god, and, as Plato’s *Timaeus*, that keen teacher of Pythagorean doctrines, says, having become “healthy and whole, arrive at the form of one’s previous state”’.

contemplation, as the *Timaeus* states (90a-d), renders the soul's harmony akin to the divine harmony. In this way, the soul recovers its original perfection in terms of musical proportions, which, as we said, were disturbed when the soul entered into the material world (*Tim.* 42e-44d).

In Neoplatonism, there are different metaphors expressing the re-orientation of the soul towards its principle.⁶ For example, ἐπιστροφή (conversion or return), ἀνάβασις (ascent)⁷, ἔγερσις (awakening), ἀνάμνησις (remembrance), and τροφή (nourishment). To illustrate the return of the soul the Neoplatonists usually make reference to Plato's *Theaetetus* (176a ff):⁸

Therefore we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; [176b] and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible. (trans. Fowler)

Neoplatonic thinkers emphasize that the 'flight' and 'return' is not understood in a literal sense, as plainly abandoning life on earth, but rather as abandoning a life attached to the sensible in a process of acquiring likeness or assimilation to the object of contemplation, that is the divine. Plotinus echoes the *Theaetetus* in his *Enneads*, I 6.8.12-21.

This would be truer advice, 'Let us fly to our dear country'. What then is our way of escape, and how are we to find it? We shall put out to sea, as Odysseus did, from the witch Circe or Calypso – as the poet says (I think with a hidden meaning) – and was not content to stay though he had delights of the eyes and lived among much beauty of sense. Our country from which we came is there, our Father is there. (trans. Armstrong)

Here Plotinus combines the notion of escape, derived from the *Theaetetus*, with the journey of Odysseus. This journey is understood in an interior (esoteric) or spiritual way and the return to the Fatherland as a re-establishment in a previous state of the soul.⁹ Consequently, the stages in this journey of ascent, namely the steps in the ladder of the planets, should not be understood as stages in space but rather as gradual states of being in the soul's metaphysical journey. Music helps to transcend the literal meaning of the stages and interiorize them as degrees in a musical scale, that is, in the harmony of the spheres.¹⁰

Since in the *Timaeus* the soul's potentialities are related to musical intervals and proportions, consequently the assimilation to divine harmony and the recovering of the soul's harmony are connected with musical education and therapy. This is affirmed in a passage in the *Timaeus* (90c6) where Plato states:

⁶ Cf. J. M. Rist, *Plotinus, the road to reality* (Cambridge 1967) 196 ff. on the language of the ascent of the soul in Plotinus (especially *Enn.* IV 8.1).

⁷ For the *ascent* of the soul to God, cf. Hierocl. in *CA* 26, 21 (116 ff. Köhler).

⁸ See, e.g., Plotinus, *Enn.* I 2.1.

⁹ Cf. J. Pépin, 'The Platonic and Christian Ulysses', in *Neoplatonism and Christian thought*, ed. D. J. O'Meara (Norfolk, Virginia 1982) 3-18.

¹⁰ The higher states of the soul are represented with various symbols, singing birds or cicadas on a tree, or the seven sciences, as in Dante's *Convivio* II, XIII, 1.

Now there is but one way of caring for anything (*θεραπεία*), namely to give it the nourishment and motions (*τροφὰς καὶ κινήσεις*) which are natural to it (*οἰκείας*=proper to each level of reality). The motions which are naturally akin (*συγγενεῖς*) to the divine part within us (*ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον, δάιμον, genius*) are the thoughts and revolutions of the universe; these, therefore, every man should follow, and correcting [recovering] those circuits in the head that were deranged at birth [in sensible becoming], by learning to know the harmonies and revolutions (*ἀρμονίαι καὶ περιφοράι*) of the universe, he should assimilate (*ἐξομοιώσωται*) his thinking part to the object thought, according to its pristine nature [recovering its original nature], and having assimilated (*όμοιωσάνται*) them win the fulfillment of the perfect life set by the gods before mankind both for this present time and for the time to come. (90c-d) (trans. Cornford, with modifications)¹¹

Music and the care of the genius

The Platonic concept of education as therapy and nourishment of the soul has two aspects. First purification, and secondly, imitation or assimilation. To these two aspects we may also add the need for a guide and a model for the return, in terms of assimilation.¹² When we apply this scheme to music, we see that the first stage of music purifies the soul and habituates it to beauty, during childhood. The second, higher stage can be conceived as life in harmony, where the soul departs from a fragmentary life to enter the unitive life, which corresponds to the metaphysical principles. This is achieved through musical likeness (*όμοιωσις*) and appropriation (*οἰκείωσις*).¹³ Between the purification of the soul

¹¹ A. E. Taylor in *A commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (Oxford 1928) 634 points out that Plato combines here two Pythagorean doctrines: ‘the thought of science as revealing the celestial melody and the constantly recurring thought of so many Platonic dialogues ... [mainly *Theaetetus*, 176 b-c, *Republic*, 613 b, etc.] that our task in life is to “follow God” or “become like God” (*όμοιώσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν*). We become like God when the revolutions in the soul, or the head, are brought into tune with the cosmic revolutions and this is also the condition of our being “sensitive” to the music made by the celestial bodies.’

Music and harmony help the soul in its quest for happiness (*εὐδαιμονία*). The more characteristic quality of our being is our *δάιμον* or *genius*, and as Plato says, our *εὐδαιμονία* is to live according to this *genius*.

¹² The guide helps the soul to re-orientate, because reactivating sight and hearing in the direction of the return to the principles is only possible if the whole head is turned around, looking again towards the archetypal reality thanks to the guidance of dialectic and the sciences. Cf. Plato, *Rep.* VII 518c and 533c-d: it is not possible to turn back the eye of the soul, without turning the whole ‘body’ or vehicle where this eye is located; also, according to the metaphor of the chariot of the soul in the *Phaedrus*, the souls follow their divine guides and try to raise the head of the charioteer up into the outer region (see 248a). Music is among the sciences that lead the soul upwards and therefore we can talk about the ‘ear’ of the soul that is purified and directed towards intelligible harmonies (cf. *Rep.* VII 531c).

¹³ Cf. Proclus, *in Remp.* I 177.15-23: ‘We say that there are three species of life in the soul. The best and more perfect is that life according to which the soul is bound to the gods and lives the life that is most akin (*συγγενεστάτην*) to them and that unites it to them through the highest likeness (*όμοιότητος ἄκρας*); this life does not belong to itself but to the gods, where the soul has surpassed

and the goal of assimilation to its model, there is an intermediary stage. This stage can be identified with nourishment and guidance. At this level music is an anagogic science, in the ancient sense of Hermetic science, which corresponds to the awakening of the intellect in the soul, where *logos* is nourished by the divine Intellect. As we said above, music, as a liberal art, is one of the mathematical sciences of the *quadrivium*. This tradition was connected to the god Hermes (or Mercury), as it appears in the work by Martianus Capella, *On the marriage of Philology and Mercury*.

Hermes as genius and guide

According to the Neoplatonic exegesis of Homer's *Odyssey* (Book X), Hermes is the guide of the Soul. He is the god who gives Odysseus the gift of memory of the Fatherland, by presenting him with the holy herb 'moly' as an antidote to Circe's potion. The herb is depicted as having a black root and a milk-white flower. In Neoplatonic tradition it represents the healing power of the *logos* and the blossoming of the flower of intellect in the soul.¹⁴

In Proclus' *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*, Hermes plays the role which corresponds to the Platonic good genius that represents the archetype for each soul. This divine archetype guides the soul to the ultimate principle, the One.¹⁵ At *in Alc.* 194.17ff. Proclus compares the soul to a musical instrument, the lyre, invented by Hermes. He then goes on to explain what he calls the Hermetic disciplines in education. These comprise gymnastics, music, the mathematical sciences, and dialectic:

its own intellect, and has *awakened* within the ineffable character of the unitive substance of the gods, and has unified the like to the like: its own light with the light there, and that which is more unitary in its own proper essence and life (*οἰκείας οὐσίας τε καὶ ζωῆς*) with the One over all essence and life.' Proclus distinguishes in this passage three kinds of life that correspond to three kinds of poetry in poetics. Proclus mentions the awakening of a transcendent life in the soul and after this refers to another two kinds of life that correspond to two levels of poetry and music that follow the same order of the procession of life. These are a second and intermediary level of life according to the soul's own intellect, together with science and discursive thought, and a third level that corresponds to the sensible life, which starts with imagination and continues with sense-perception and the irrational part of the soul.

¹⁴ Cf. H. Rahner, *Greek myth and Christian mystery* (New York 1963) 192 ff. According to this author, already in the Stoic exegesis of this myth, *moly* represents the gift of *logos* (194). Rahner points out that the Neopythagoreans and Neoplatonists interpret the myth as having a 'psycho-therapeutic implication' and as meaning that 'a healing of the soul, a transition from the chthonic root to the heavenly flower, can only be effected through a power that comes from above.' The white flower is related in Neoplatonism to the Chaldean symbol of the 'flower of the intellect', related to the light of the intellect, and as a gift of Hermes is identified with the divine spark of fire within the soul (197). Themistius and other writers interpret this as indicating that Hermes is the divine *logos* and the heavenly gift of *moly* is the heavenly *paideia* (202).

¹⁵ In this Platonic dialogue, according to Proclus, Socrates also plays the role of the good genius, and shows Alcibiades what is the real inner man, the true self, in contrast to the terrestrial man. This is the same role of Hermes showing the primordial archetype of man's life and showing how to convert to oneself and return to the archetype through the presence of the divine in the soul's intellect.

The mathematical sciences and dialectic awake and elevate our reason; for the eye of the soul, which is blinded¹⁶ and obstructed, because of many other occupations, under their influence is re-ignited and returns towards itself and to self-knowledge. With these sciences our *logos* is nourished and through them ascends towards the Intellect, as Socrates says here. (*in Alc.* 194.17-195.3).¹⁷

Hermetic music is *anagogic* and guides the soul to the intelligible music of the Muses and Apollo. The anagogic power of music is clearly affirmed by Proclus in his *Hymn to the Muses*, where he praises the ‘light that raises man aloft, on the nine daughters of great Zeus with splendid voices, who have rescued [...] the souls who were wandering in the depth of life, through immaculate rites from intellect-awaking books’ (1-5, trans. R. M. van den Berg).

The remembrance of the harmony of the spheres

The aim of Pythagorean music was, according to Iamblichus, to reactivate the remembrance of celestial music through imitation and contemplation.¹⁸ In his *Life of Pythagoras* Iamblichus states that Pythagoras could hear the harmony of the spheres and that he taught his disciples to play the lyre and sing in order to purify their intellect and to reactivate their memory.¹⁹ In a similar way, Cicero depicts the return of the soul through music and imitation in his *De re publica (Somnium Scipionis)* VI, XVIII 18-19:

¹⁶ Cf. Proclus, *in Eucl.* 20.17-23 and Plato, *Rep.* VII 527e.

¹⁷ The *First Alcibiades* deals with the return of the soul towards itself (and self-knowledge), and how from that stage of concentration the soul turns to the divine *Nous*. Proclus suggests in this text a connection to Plato, *Phdr.* 247d1, *Prt.* 313c5-6, *Rep.* III 401e1, *Tim.* 90, etc. when he says ‘our thought is *nourished* (*τρέφεται*) with these sciences’ evoking and combining *τρέφω*, *ἐπιστροφή* (although *τρέφω* and *τρέπω* have different roots), nourishment, and return, and connecting these ideas with a conception of ‘true being’ identified with light and fire (that in the allegory of the Cave is at the top of the cave), and a re-orientation towards the Sun (*τρόπος*, *περιαγωγή*), etc.

¹⁸ Another aspect of Hermes mentioned above is memory, and since the mathematical sciences are for Proclus *anamnetic* of the Intelligible it is not difficult to see the connection between Hermes’ gift of memory and the sciences. The Muses as daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne are also goddesses of memory as Proclus expresses in his Hymn, because they lead away from forgetfulness. Macrobius says in his commentary on Cicero’s *Somnium Scipionis*, Book II 3.7: ‘[...] the soul carries with it into the body a memory of the music which it knew in the sky’ (transl. W. H. Stahl).

¹⁹ On the other hand, Iamblichus says that Pythagoras did not need to use these instruments for himself because he had a deeper intuitive and spiritual sense of hearing (we could call it the ear of the soul). [Pythagoras] extended his ears, and fixed (*ἐνίρπειδε*) his intellect in the sublime symphonies of the world [...] and being therefore irrigated as it were (*ἀρδόμενος*) with this melody, having the reason of his intellect well arranged (*εὐτάκτούμενος*), he conceived the idea of giving his disciples some image of these things, imitating them, so far as it was possible, through musical instruments or the unaccompanied voice. He believed that he, alone of those on earth, could hear and understand the sounds (*φθέγματα*) of the universe, and that he was worthy to learn from the fountain-head and origin of existence, and to make himself, by effort and imitation, like the heavenly beings; the divine power which brought him to birth had given him alone this fortunate endowment. Other people, he thought, must be content to look to him, and to derive their profit and improvement from the images and models he offered them as gifts, since they were not able

Learned men, imitating this harmony on stringed instruments and in song, have opened for themselves a way back to this place, as have others, who with excelling genius, have cultivated divine sciences in human life. (trans. A. P. Peabody with modifications).

Odysseus' musical journey through the harmony of the spheres

As we have stressed, for the Neoplatonists, Odysseus represents the returning soul. Consequently, if we examine the place music holds in Odysseus' return to the Fatherland, we can better understand the role of music in this return. The episode of the Sirens comes readily to mind. However, the music of the Sirens does not seem to guide the soul in its ascent. On the contrary, their music is a hindrance for the return. This is clear in Proclus' *Commentary on the Republic*:

On one side there is the harmony that is proper to the divine and saves the souls, which is firmly established in the gods (ἐνιδρύουσα τοῖς θεοῖς); on the other hand there is the harmony related to *genesis*, which attaches the souls to material things. The first is the result of the action of the Muses that educate and perfect the intellectual potencies in us, making them similar to the celestial order; the second is proper to some Sirens, and is proper to the harmonies that organize the disposition towards three dimensions in the level of *genesis*. It is clear that the Sirens preside over this kind of harmony. But he who wants to follow the ascendant path and save himself, will sail by and sail past them (*παραπλεύσεται cf.* Plato, *Phdr.* 259 a 7), and follow the better harmony as the true musician; but the uneducated majority will enjoy being bound by the Sirens and stay in nature and the sweetness of nature bewitched by them. (in *Remp.* II 68.3-16, my trans. based on Festugière)

Jean Pépin, however, has put forward another, more positive, Pythagorean interpretation of the myth. He portrays the Sirens as 'soul-guiding and helping musicians'.²⁰ Two Platonic dialogues, the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*, provide us with the key to understanding this inconsistency concerning the role of the Sirens. In the *Republic*, the inclusion of the Sirens in the myth of Er (617b4-7) points to a Pythagorean exegesis of the *Odyssey*. According to this, Odysseus' journey represents the ascent of the soul through

truly to apprehend the pure, primary archetypes.' (Iamblichus, *VP* XV 65, 36.18-66, 37.17, trans. G. Clark with some modifications from Thomas Taylor). Pythagoras appears in Iamblichus as a soul that has ascended through music and descended again to teach and guide his disciples and humanity what he had heard above, in the same way that the philosopher in the *Republic* leaves the cave and returns to it to awaken those who remained there and to teach his students by way of the imitation of the divine harmony with instruments and song. Iamblichus goes on comparing these representations of that divine music (that cannot be heard directly) in Pythagorean audible music with the images of the sun shown in mirrors, water surfaces, etc., needed in order to make it known because it is hard to see the Sun directly, using a comparison with mirror-like images present also in Plato's *Republic* VII.

²⁰ Pépin (n.9, above) 8; for his study of the Pythagorean exegesis see 4 ff.

the harmony of the spheres.²¹ The *Phaedrus* also offers an explanation through the myth of the cicadas. Pépin argued that while in Homer the Sirens are presented in a negative way, as a danger which should be avoided, the Pythagorean interpretation, preserved in Plato and Plutarch, portrays them as having a more positive influence.²²

There are two aspects that have to be considered. The first is the identification of the Sirens with the planetary music and their having the role of some kind of musical guides for the souls. The second is the necessity of sailing past the Sirens, which is expressed by Proclus with the verb παραπλεύσεται, the same verb Plato uses in the *Phaedrus* (259a7) with reference to the avoidance of the sleepiness provoked by the cicadas, as Pépin pointed out.²³ In the *Phaedrus*, Plato presents the cicadas as dangerous and helpful at the same time. Dangerous for those who fall asleep and helpful in their role as musician guides, for the souls that listen and acknowledge them as messengers of the Muses.²⁴

Plato's comparison of the Sirens with the cicadas is clarified in the Neoplatonic exegesis of the *Phaedrus* by Hermias. According to Hermias, Odysseus' journey is directed towards the awakening of the soul, in the context of forgetfulness of the Fatherland. Here forgetfulness is associated with sleepiness, caused by the Sirens or the cicadas. Hermias says in his commentary on *Phaedrus* 259 a:

Just as those, [Plato] says, who are attracted and bewitched by the Sirens forget their own fatherland, so also we, if we give in to the magic of these sights and these cicadas and are plunged into sleep, forget our own fatherland and our ascent to the intelligible ($\tauῇσ εἰς τὸ νοητὸν ἀναγωγῆς$). But if we awaken in ourselves discernment and vigilance, if we refuse the attraction of the sweetness of life, we sail past ($\piαραπλέομεν$) like Odysseus, we avoid life here below, we become worthy of our own fatherland and of our ascent toward the intelligible. 'The gift that they have from

²¹ Iamblichus provides evidence for the Pythagorean origin of the connection between cosmic harmony and the Sirens in his *Life of Pythagoras* (VP XVIII 82, 47.15-16): 'What is the oracle of Delphi?/The tetrakty; that is, the harmony in which the Sirens sing.' (trans. W. Burkert, *Lore and science in ancient Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge, Mass. 1972) 187)

²² 'Now Homer's Sirens, it is true, frighten us, inconsistently with the Platonic myth; but the poet too conveyed a truth symbolically, namely that the power of their music is not inhuman or destructive; as souls depart from this world to the next, so it seems, and drift uncertainly after death, it creates in them a passionate love for the heavenly and divine, and forgetfulness of mortality; it possesses them and enchant them with its spell, so that in joyfulness they follow the Sirens and join them in their circuits. Here on Earth a kind of faint echo of that music reaches us, and appealing to our souls through the medium of words, reminds ($\lambdaναμμνήσκει$) them of what they experienced in an earlier existence. The ears of most souls, however, are plastered over and blocked up, not with wax, but with carnal obstructions and affections. But any soul that through innate gifts is aware of this echo, and remembers that other world, suffers what falls in no way short of the very maddest passions of love, longing and yearning to break the tie with the body, but unable to do so' (Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.* IX 14.6.745D-F trans. Sandbach as quoted by Pépin (n.9, above) 4).

²³ Pépin (n.9, above) 5 ff.

²⁴ The cicadas are like souls that live only with intellectual nourishment; they do not eat but sing all the time: singing is compared then to the intellectual nourishment of the souls in the meadow of Truth, because they contemplate or listen to the Muses all the time (the models for their thought and also the addressees of their hymn).

the gods'; – if, then, it were to happen, [Plato] says, that we would be able to sail past the Sirens (*παραπλεῦσαι*), the Sirens who are in the sensible world (*ἐν τῷ αἰσθητῷ κόσμῳ*), which is to say the demons who hold back souls in proximity of coming-to-be (*περὶ τὴν γένεσιν*), then at that moment the cicadas, that is, the divine souls and the gods, seeing us revolting against coming-to-be and living like gods, would give us the greatest gift for men, which is to treat us as companions. For as the gods are vigilant in their own activity, so we also should awaken ourselves as far as possible, and it is then that we awaken ourselves, if we reactivate the reason (*λόγον*) which is in us. (trans. Pépin with small modifications)²⁵

In this text the cicadas have a double meaning, either Sirens or divine souls that give guidance and a divine gift to human souls. Proclus considers that there are different kinds of Sirens and shows in a clear way that there is no inconsistency in considering the Sirens either a hindrance or guidance in the journey of the soul. As he explains, there are three different levels of Sirens: first, the Sirens of Plato's *Republic*, which are 'celestial Sirens'; second, the terrestrial Sirens within the world of *genesis*, which are Homer's Sirens; third, the subterrestrial Sirens. It is common to all Sirens, Proclus states, to produce a physical harmony. The Muses, on the other hand, are associated with intellective harmony (*νοερὰ ἀρμονία*) (*in Remp.* II. 238.21-239.14).²⁶

The value for the human soul that listens to the harmony of the Sirens is that this chain can transmit the anagogic power of the harmony of the Muses to human souls, provided that we attach ourselves to the principles by way of the vertical ascent through the

²⁵ *in Phaedrum*, 214.4-24 Couvreur, quoted in Pépin (n.9, above) 6-7.

²⁶ Proclus' text states: 'Plato called them "Sirens" to indicate that the harmony they impart to the rings is always bound to the material world, but he called them "celestial Sirens" in order to distinguish them from the Sirens within *genesis*, which he himself elsewhere agrees that Odysseus sailed past, as in Homer's story [*Phdr.* 259 a]. These last Sirens, however, come from the dyad, for the poet uses the dual to refer to them as if there were two of them: the poet says "the voice of the two Sirens". The others, however, have their origin from the monad, for the one that presides over the unitary circle, the outermost circle, leads the hebdomad. Thus it is entirely fitting that an appropriate quantity be spread below this dyad, and if the celestial monad is followed by seven, then the dyad that generates the world of change (*γένεσις*) must have twice seven, and often the theologians multiply the zones of heaven by two in the sublunar zones. There are likewise Sirens in Hades, which he clearly mentions in *Cratylus* [403d8 ff], saying that they will not leave Hades because they are bewitched by the wisdom of Pluto.'

Thus there are three classes of Sirens by Plato's own account: the celestial ones belonging to Zeus; the ones that function in this terrestrial world belonging to Poseidon; and the subterrestrial (hypothontic) ones belonging to Pluto. It is common to all these kinds to produce a physical harmony, tied to the order of the corporeal, for the Muses are specifically granted the intellective (noeric) harmony (*νοερὰ ἀρμονία*). This is why they are said to conquer the Sirens and crown themselves with their feathers, for they are uplifting principles (*anagogic*) for the Sirens, and attaching them, the Muses fasten the anagogic potencies with which they are endowed with their intellective activity (*νοήσις*).²⁷ (trans. Lamberton with modifications)

spheres, that is, in the appropriate order of the hierarchy or ladder of existence, represented in the mast of Odysseus' ship.²⁷

The four kinds of music in Proclus

Proclus' distinction of levels of Sirens should be considered in the wider context of the classification of levels of music, in his *Commentary on the Republic* I.57ff. Each level or kind (*εἶδος*) of music is explained according to a particular Platonic dialogue.²⁸

(1) The first level of music is identified with Philosophy as the highest *mousikē*, according to the *Phaedo* (61a). It can also be called 'science of love' (*έρωτική*), for it corresponds to a unitive knowledge related by Proclus to Apollo. (Cf. Plato, *Symp.* 186a-187a.) 'On one side', Proclus says, Apollo 'celebrates his father with intellectual hymns, and on the other keeps the whole world together (*συνέχει*) with permanent bonds' (*in Remp.* I 57.13-15). This level corresponds to the One (the Father), from the perspective that it is directed towards attachment to the One, which is what gives unity and harmony to everything that exists.

(2) The second level of music is defined by Proclus as the inspiration that comes from the Muses. It is called inspired music and corresponds to inspired poetry in the *Phaedrus* (245a). This kind of music stimulates the soul and sets it in motion towards that kind of poetry, in which inspired state the poet is possessed by the gods. At this level of music the art of the musician is identified with the art of the poet 'because', as Proclus says, 'inspired music (*ἐνθεος μουσική*) is what brings the inspired poet to perfection' (*in Remp.* I 58.1-2). This kind of music has an important capacity to educate, by means of particular example. This level is still higher than reason, because it is identified with inspiration.

(3) There is a third type of music, which we consider as related to the level of music as a science of the *quadrivium*. This type corresponds to the second stage in Platonic education in the *Republic*. Proclus describes it in the following text:

Then he also talks about the third kind of *mousikē*: this one is no longer inspired, like the one mentioned before, but nevertheless it leads up (*ἀναγωγόν*) from perceptible harmonies to the imperceptible beauty of the divine harmony. For this kind of *mousikos*, too, loves beauty, just like the lover, although the latter is reminded of beauty by means of sight, while the former is reminded by means of hearing (*in Remp.* I 58.27-59.3, trans. Sheppard).

Proclus continues his exposition of this level of music, quoting *Phaedrus* 248d3, where Plato lists this kind of musician as pertaining to the first type of life:

²⁷ Clement of Alexandria says: 'Pythagoras advises that it is better to enjoy the Muses than the Sirens, and teaches to practise wisdom, not from the pleasant, rejecting its enchantment unreservedly as deceitful.' (*Strom.* I, 48.6)

²⁸ Anne Sheppard has studied this classification in 'Music therapy in Neoplatonism' (n. 3, above). The correspondences between levels and Platonic dialogues are not shown in all the cases, but even the level of scientific music, which is not correlated explicitly, can be traced to Plato's *Republic*. Cf. Sheppard 149.

He [Plato] mentions three kinds of persons who had chosen a kind of life that is elevating and which returns (ἀναγωγὸν καὶ ἐπιστρεπτικὸν βίον) starting from the last levels and directed towards the primordial ones, from where they have descended; and these persons are the philosopher, the lover, and the musician. (*in Remp. I* 59.4-7)

Proclus here explains the third kind of music, which is anagogic, with reference to music, love, and philosophy as anagogic activities. Proclus already mentioned this association of types of lives (the musician, the lover, and the philosopher), when he compared the first kind of music with philosophy, which is the highest kind of music and the science of love. This shows that for Proclus the third stage of music is part of the activity of our intellect in its attempt to return to the first stage of music, which corresponds to the archetypal life, namely the divine Intellect directed towards the One. Therefore, the possession of, or union with, this kind of music, and not merely the activity involved in reaching it, is the aim of the philosopher, the musician, and the lover. Accordingly, Proclus says that though the experience of the third level of music is ἐρωτικός, the first level is ἐρωτικωτάτην μουσικήν (music highly related to love) (*in Remp. I* 57.10).

Nevertheless, music as a science of the *quadrivium* does not content itself with staying among the images in the world of change and division, but directs the soul towards the models. The mathematical sciences in the soul are speculative in nature (as in the case of the medieval *musica speculativa*) by virtue of being a *dianoetic* mirror of the intuitive knowledge of the *Nous*.

(4) The fourth, and final, type of music is a kind of music that educates the passions and moves the character by means of modes (namely, musical scales) and rhythms that lead to ἀρετή (virtue). This type corresponds to the kind of music that belongs to the first stage of Platonic education in *Republic*, Book III. This is the level of therapeutic and educative music, which corresponds to the sensible music that we are acquainted with since childhood. Proclus' classification of different levels of music is represented in the diagram at the end of this paper.

Proclus concludes this section with a strong affirmation of the anagogic character of music. This art, he says, is able to transcend art as mere imitation, showing that it is truly a sacred art, which exercises important influence in guiding the soul to the primordial reality:

The higher kind of life corresponds to this [higher] kind of music and Plato separates it from poetics, because poetics is proper to imitation, and this kind of music cannot follow an imitative life staying at this level with copies; but music prefers to snatch itself out (ἀναρπάζειν) of copies in order to ascend towards the divine models of harmony and rhythm for all in this world. (*in Remp. I* 60.6-13, my trans. following Festugière).

Epilogue

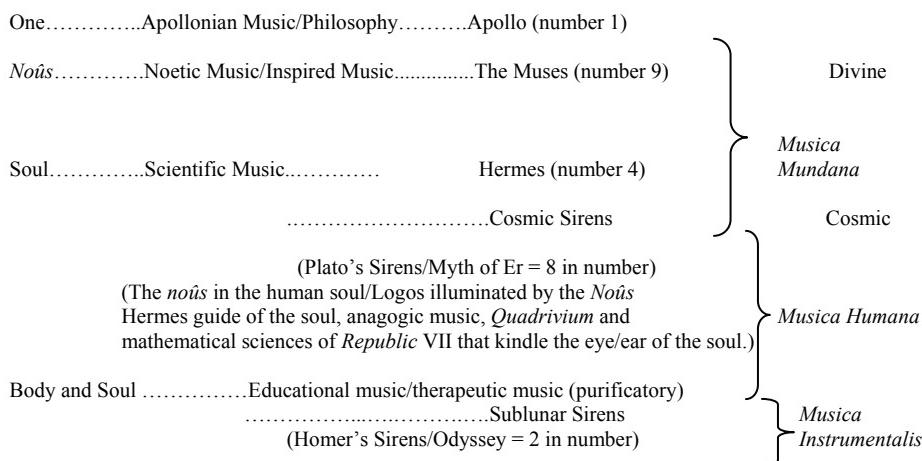
We have tried to show that the basic scheme which organizes music as a reality and as an art/science is essentially triadic, in the sense that it leads the soul from the sensible to the intelligible, through an intermediary stage that is the realization (or recovery) of inner harmony at its own level. This intermediary stage orientates the soul towards its source, thus enabling it to receive and familiarize itself (through tuning and musical sympathy) with intelligible harmony. This stage represents the awakening of the *nous* in the soul.

The diagram at the end of this study includes a similar triadic scheme, known in its Boethian formulation: *musica mundana*, *musica humana*, and *musica instrumentalis*, which correspond to *nous*, *soul*, and *body*. These three elements, together with the level which corresponds to the ultimate One, make the four levels of music in Proclus' classification.

What is important is that the soul contains within itself all three levels, because of its intermediary nature, that mirrors the reality which is above and the reality which is below. For this reason the soul traverses the whole harmonic reality, as if it were a musical scale, in its journey of ascent to the intelligible with the help and guide of the music of Hermes, the Muses, and Apollo.

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Diagram: Levels of Music in Proclus' Commentary on the Republic



Each Boethian level in this diagram spans more than one Proclan level (e.g. *Musica Mundana* covers both Noetic Music and Scientific Music); this is mainly due to the analogical character of Proclus' philosophy, in which each superior level is mirrored in the following inferior level, in the hierarchy of reality. In this way all the levels are unified in a continuous mirroring chain. *Musica Instrumentalis* appears at the bottom of the diagram; however, this kind of music can serve as a symbol of the highest levels of being at the same time.